Director’s Note...
we couldn’t do it without YOU

Our days continue to be full here at Family Services. So far this year we launched the “Success Mentors” program at Lawrence High School, have sworn in two new teams of CASA advocates, celebrated our mentoring programs through our 10th annual BOWL A STRIKE FOR KIDS, welcomed a FEMA worker to support our ongoing assistance to families displaced by Hurricane Maria, and much, much more.

I continue to be struck by the small army of individuals, including both Family Services’ staff and volunteers, who drive our work day in and day out. The essential programs and services we deliver here in the Merrimack Valley would simply not be possible without the compassionate dedication of so many. It gives me great pleasure to see their contributions being recognized. Recently, one of our longtime CASA volunteers, Kathleen Cook, (pictured above left) was saluted at the National CASA Conference in Boston where she received a Child Advocate of the Year award.

Congratulations Kathleen! Thank you for your ongoing support. And, many thanks to each of you who step up for children and families in the Merrimack Valley by supporting the work that we do.

Elizabeth Sweeney,
Chief Executive Officer

Hello Spring!
an evening of celebration

Thank you to the many guests who helped us welcome in spring and celebrate Family Services’ mission at our Annual Gala on April 27. The event raised over $100,000, which will directly benefit the children and families helped by Family Services.

A special THANK YOU to event co-Chairs Lacey Dolben (shown below with Family Services CEO Liz Sweeney) and Stephanie Sipley. Thank you also to our Platinum Sponsors: The DeLuca Family, Pentucket Bank, Deane and Lacey Dolben and Gold Sponsors: Commercial Contracting Maintenance, Howe Insurance, KPMG, Merrimack Valley Credit Union, and NetScout.
Thank YOU

Proceeds from our Annual Gala directly support the programs and services we offer here at Family Services of the Merrimack Valley. On behalf of all of these young faces, “THANK YOU” for all that you do in support of helping them realize and reach their personal bests!

That Someone Who Matters!
Success Mentors Program Kicks Off at Lawrence High School...

“It’s been a monumental task to get this new program off of the ground, and much credit goes out to our Family Services’ mentoring staff for doing so,” commented Family Services’ CEO, Liz Sweeney, on the launch of our new “Success Mentors” program. Success Mentors targets Lawrence High School students identified as being at risk for dropping out of school and matches them with teachers, administrators, and other individuals within the high school who serve as mentors.

Success Mentors provide guidance, motivation and accountability for attending school and staying on track with academic demands. The mentors also serve as “connectors,” helping to flag challenges causing absenteeism and connecting mentees to appropriate school personnel that would otherwise remain untapped. The program is supported by a one million dollar grant from the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

“Ninth grade is literally one of the most important years in a student’s career from the time they begin kindergarten to the moment they graduate high school,” shared Lawrence High School's Ninth Grade Co-Principal Elijah Hecksttl (pictured above with the school’s Dean of Family & Community, Jasmitila Duran) as he welcomed the 50 students sitting down to meet their new mentors.

In addition to Lawrence High School, Family Services is also supporting implementation of this mentoring model in the cities of Holyoke and Springfield. To learn more go to FSMV.org.

Family Services Awarded $30,000 Cummings Foundation Sustaining Grant

Family Services is very honored to have recently been awarded a Sustaining Grant by the Cummings Foundation. This grant will provide 10 consecutive years of support for Family Services’ Stand & Deliver academic mentoring program.

“Family Services of the Merrimack Valley has a true friend in the Cummings Foundation,” shared Family Services’ CEO, Liz Sweeney upon learning of the award. “Their generous support will allow us to not only continue to grow our highly successful Stand & Deliver mentoring program, but also enhance the model to strengthen its long term impact. As a result of the generosity of Joyce and Bill Cummings and their entire organization, Family Services will reach more students, matching them with mentors who will help them be successful in school, strive to attend college and ultimately lead a better life.”

Liz accepted the award in person, on behalf of Family Services at The Foundation’s May 3rd Sustaining Grants Awards Night.
“Children have better outcomes when dads are involved,” contends John O’Neil, Director of the Nurturing Father’s Program, who Family Services recently welcomed to its offices as part of its Fathers and Family Network training series. This free monthly training series is tailored especially for local providers looking to improve their ability to engage fathers in community services. Mr. O’Neil (pictured above with Family Services’ Family Programs Director Betsy Green) seized the opportunity to share some best practices for making social service agencies more “father friendly”.

Speaking of which... last month Family Services hosted a Dinner with Dads, where local dads and their children gathered for dinner and an arts and craft activity featuring a blank canvas and rainbow of colors with which to paint. We recognize that caring for children is a challenge. Dinner with Dads is one way we let fathers know we are here to help!

If someone gets a burn, which of the following should you swiftly apply to the wound? A) Ice B) Water C) Butter, or D) Burn Cream? This was just one of the questions posed to a group of young mothers by Captain Patrick Delany and Lieutenant Mike Armano of the Lawrence Fire Department during a recent visit to our Canal Street offices. They were querying the parents over lunch as part of Family Services’ ongoing wellness programming offered through our Young Parent Support (YPS) group, which is funded by the MA. Department of Children and Families. We are grateful for the expertise and their help illustrating that small safeguards really can go a long way. (And, the correct answer, surprisingly, is “B”. Water is the best remedy!)

Benjamin Franklin once said that the best thing to give to an enemy is “forgiveness”, to an opponent, “tolerance”, to a friend, “your heart”, and to a child, a “good example”. The mentoring programs we offer at Family Services are guided by a deep conviction that every child needs that someone to listen and take an interest in their well being – someone who they might emulate as their own life unfolds. Mariangely Martinez (pictured below) was a longtime participant in our Stand & Deliver program and is one such illustration of our precept in action.

Mariangely became involved with Stand & Deliver in fifth grade and remained a mentee through her freshman year. Now a full-time student at Rivier College, she has big dreams and every intention of capturing them!

“Stand & Deliver was of interest to me because it was a way for me to have something to do after school and an actual motive to make sure my homework was complete.

Mariangely now reflects: “I am a proud mentee, and I LOVE telling people that I used to go to Pfizer for tutoring sessions... My mentor was named Kim. She too was awesome and the BEST mentor. Kim genuinely cared about me and my work and making sure that I succeeded in school. Having someone that wasn’t family care about me and my studies meant a lot and opened my eyes to know that it is important for me to finish school.”
Every month, Family Services features one young person who is patiently waiting (sometimes for up to two years!) to be matched with an adult mentor. This month, we’re pleased to feature Laishalee.

Nine-year old Laishalee is a gifted singer who performs each year in her school’s talent show. Family Services’ Big Friends Little Friends mentoring program is seeking a caring adult volunteer to be a mentor to Laishalee, and other waiting children. Mentors help children build confidence, explore new activities, and gain life skills for social and academic success.

Laishalee’s friendly and outgoing personality enable her to warm up easily to caring adults. She hopes a mentor will teach her how to sew and plant a garden. An ideal mentor will nurture Laishalee’s curiosity about her world and share enthusiasm for learning new things.

Please contact Christina Haines (chaines@fsmv.org) today to get started making a positive impact in the life of a child. Keep current on future “Mentees of the Month” and all of our news at FSMV.org, and on social media at: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.